

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

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O 111542Z JUL 78

FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8729

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY CAIRO IMMEDIATE

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY JIDDA IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV IMMEDIATE

USMISSION USUN IMMEDIATE

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 DAMASCUS 3947

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1

TAGS: PEPR, PINS, SY, LE

SUBJ: LEBANON SITUATION

1. SUMMARY: MFA OFFICIALS TAKING THREAT OF SARKIS RESIGNATION MORE SERIOUSLY AND EXPECT JULY 11 VISIT BY KAMAL AS'AD TO CLARIFY SITUATION. THEY CLAM SARKIS DEMANDING 1) FULL CONTROL OF ADF, 2) DISARMING MILITIAS, AND 3) IMPLEMENTATION OF CAIRO AND RIYADH ACCORDS. ASSAD MAY BE WILLING TO MEET SARKIS REQUIREMENTS BUT IS FACING RESISTANCE FROM HIS MILITARY. PRESIDENT ASSAD TOOK US CALL FOR UNSC MEETING AS "UNFRIENDLY ACT." HE WANTS TO ENGAGE IN DIALOGUE BUT DOES NOT WANT DICTATES. IT APPEARS THAT SARG HAS NO CLEAR VISION OF HOW TO DEFUSE SITUATION AND WE ARE CONCERNED ABOUT ADVICE PRESIDENT MAY BE GETTING FROM HIS MILITARY. ASAD'S PREFERENCE, WE BELIEVE, WILL BE TO MAINTAIN CEASE-FIRE AND ALLOW NEGOTIATION ANOTHER CHANCE-- UNLESS NEW CHRISTIAN PROVOCATIONS FORCE HIS HAND. END

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SUMMARY.

2. SINCE CHARGE'S REQUESTED MEETING WITH FONMIN KHADDAM MAY NOT TAKE PLACE TODAY, POLOFF DISCUSSED LEBANON SITUATION IN SEPARATE CONVERSATIONS WITH KHADDAM'S INTERPRETER SAMIH ABU FARES AND AMERICAN AFFAIRS DIRECTOR SIAG JULY 11. BOTH SAID THAT SPEAKER OF LEBANESE PARLIAMENT KAMAL AL-

AS'AD WAS BRINGING SARKIS'S ANSWER ON RESIGNATION TO DAMASCUS TODAY. THEY SAID THAT SARKIS IS STILL COMMITTED TO RESIGN AND THEY APPEARED TO TAKE THREAT MORE SERIOUSLY THAN THEY HAD IN PREVIOUS CONVERSATIONS. SIAGE AND SARKIS HAS STIPULATED THREE CONDITIONS FOR REMAINING IN OFFICE: 1) FULL CONTROL OVER ADF, 2) DISARMING ALL MILITIAS, AND 3) IMPLEMENTATION OF RIYADH AND CAIRO ACCORDS. SIAGE SAID HE BELIEVED SYRIA WAS PREPARED TO AGREE TO ALL THREE CONDITIONS ALTHOUGH PRESIDENT AL-ASSAD IS FACING RESISTANCE FROM HIGH-LEVEL SYRIAN MILITARY OFFICERS VIS-A-VIS THE FIRST CONDITION. SIAGE SAID HE FEARED THAT PHALANGE AND NLP WOULD NOT AGREE TO SARKIS' CONDITIONS AND EXPECTED THAT THIS WAS MESSAGE KAMAL AL-AS'AD IS BRINGING WITH HIM.

3. ABU FARES POINTED OUT THAT US MOVES TO CONVOKE SECURITY COUNCIL ON LEBANON HAD BEEN SEEN AS AN "UNFRIENDLY ACT" BY PRESIDENT AL-ASSAD. ABU FARES EXPRESSED UNDERSTANDING OF US MOTIVATION AND US CONCERN FOR REGIONAL SECURITY. NEVERTHELESS, HE FELT THAT US DID NOT NEED TO RESORT TO SECURITY COUNCIL TO KEEP ISRAELIS IN LINE AND THAT INTERNATIONALIZATION OF PROBLEM WOULD MAKE PROBLEM MORE RATHER THAN LESS DIFFICULT TO DEAL WITH. PRESIDENT, ACCORDING TO ABU FARES, WOULD HAVE UNDERSTOOD USG SEEKING SYRIAN AND LEBANESE REACTION TO IDEA OF CALLING SECURITY COUNCIL MEETING BUT TO CAST DECISION AS FAIT ACCOMPLI WAS AN UNFORTUNATE APPROACH WHICH TENDED TO UNDERCUT SYRIAN DESIRE
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FOR DIALOGUE WITH USG ON LEBANON'S PROBLEMS.

4. ABU FARES AID THAT CEASE-FIRE IS STILL HOLDING IN BEIRUT. HE CLAIMED THAT LAST NIGHT SYRIAN FORCES TRIED TO RESUPPLY A SYRIAN OUTPOST OF 30 SOLDIERS WHICH HAD BEEN CUT OFF. ABUT FARES DENIED THAT THERE HAD BEEN ANY AGREEMENT WITH CHRISTIAN FORCES FOR RESUPPLY AND SAID "WE WERE TRYING TO SNEAK SUPPLY TRUCK THROUGH." HE ADDED THAT INCIDENT HAD BEEN OF LIMITED DURATION.

5. ABUT FARES FELT THAT SARG WOULD HAVE A BETTER FEEL FOR WHAT IS POSSIBLE AFTER CONSULTATIONS TODAY WITH KAMAL AL-AS'AD. NEVERTHELESS, WHEN POLOFF MENTIONED VARIOUS WAYS THE SITUATION MIGHT BE DEFUSED, ABU FARES SAW NO POSSIBILITY, AT THIS POINT, FOR USING LAF TROOPS IN SECURITY FUNCTIONS IN CHRISTIAN AREAS OF BEIRUT IN LIEU OF ADF TROOPS. HE CLAIMED THAT THERE ARE NOT RELIABLE LEBANESE TROOPS CAPABLE OF ENFORCING THE DECISIONS OF THE STATE. THE LEBANESE ARMY IS A CONGLOMERATION OF UNITS WHICH OWE THEIR LOYALTY TO ONE SIDE OR THE OTHER. ABU FARES SAW NO FORCE EXCEPT ADF WHICH COULD FORSTALL RETURN TO ANARCHY AND CIVIL WAR.

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EXDIS

6. ABU FARES DENIED SYRIA HAS ANY INTENTION OF DESTROYING OR ANNIHILATING THE PHALANGE OR THE NLP. WHAT SYRIA SOUGHT TO DO WAS TO DESTROY OR DISARM THOSE ELEMENTS IN THOSE ORGANIZATIONS WHICH PLACED THEMSELVES ABOVE THE STATE AND TRIED TO DICTATE TO THE STATE.

7. ABU FARES ASKED WHAT USG WAS DOING WITH ISRAELIS TO TRY TO BRING SITUATION UNDER CONTROL. POLOFF SAID WE HAD BEEN IN FREQUENT CONTACT WITH DEFMIN WEIZMAN AND THAT HE UNDERSTOOD GRAVITY OF SITUATION AND HAD TOLD CHAMOUN ON GEMAYEL TO COOL IT IN NO UNCERTAIN TERMS. ABU FARES ASKED, IF THIS IS SO, WHY ISRAELIS CONTINUE TO MAKE PUBLIC STATEMENTS WHICH ENCOURAGE CHRISTIAN INTRANSIGENCE? WHILE HE DID NOT DOUBT US WAS DOING ITS BEST AND WAS EVEN PREPARED TO BELIEVE WEIZMAN WAS BEING HELPFUL, CHRISTIANS COULD BE EXCUSED FOR BELIEVING ISRAEL WILL COME TO THE RESCUE WHEN ISRAEL CONTINUES TO PUBLICLY POSE AS THE DEFENDER OF ALL LEBANESE CHRISTIANS.

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8. COMMENT: JUDGING FROM COMMENTS OF THESE TWO RELATIVELY WELL-INFORMED SYRIAN OFFICIALS, SYRIANS DO NOT APPEAR TO HAVE ANY FIRM IDEA HOW TO KEEP THE IMMEDIATE SITUATION UNDER CONTROL. SYRIANS HAVE COMMITTED THEMSELVES TO CURBING PHALANGE AND NLP AND SEE VERY FEW LEVERS TO WORK WITH OTHER THAN ARTILLERY AND MORTARS. WE HAVE TRIED TO DRAW PICTURE OF ANARCHY THAT MIGHT PREVAIL IF SARKIS RESIGNS, BUT SYRIANS HAVE LONG BEEN DISSATISFIED WITH HIS PERFORMANCE AND MAY BE TEMPTED INTO BELIEVING THAY CAN FIND A MORE EFFECTIVE REPLACEMENT.

9. JUDGING FROM SIAGE'S COMMENT WE GATHER THAT PRESIDENT HAS BEEN UNDER PRESSURE FROM SYRIAN MILITARY TO RETAIN INDEPENDENCE OF ACTION AND, WE SUSPECT, TO KNOCK HEADS TOGETHER. GIVEN SIAGE-S NORMAL RETICENCE TO EVEN MENTION THE SYRIAN MILITARY WE TAKE HIS STATEMENT VERY SERIOUSLY. WE RECALL THAT SOME GENREALS DURING INITIAL SYRIAN THRUST INTO LEBANON WERE PUSHING THE PRESIDENT TO SEEK A MILITARY SOLUTION OT LEBANON'S PROBLEMS. WE ASSUME THEY HAVE NOT CHANGED THEIR VIEWPOINTS AND THEY ARE PROBABLY BEING SUPPORTED NOW BY THE PRESIDENT'S BROTHER, RIF'AT.

10. THIS ADVICE IS BEING COUNTERED BY ASSAD'S OWN CAUTION AND BY ADVICE OF SAUDI AND KUWAITI FOREIGN MINISTERS (WE PRESUME) AS WELL AS VARIOUS MESSAGES AND PRESSURES FORM WESTERN GOVERNMENTS AND HIS CONCULATATIONS WITH LEBANESE POLITICAL LEADERS. HIS OWN PREFERENCE, WE BELIEVE, WILL BE TO MAINTAIN CEAS-FIRE, ALLOW TEMPERS TO COOL, AND GIVE NEGOTIATION ANOTHER CHANCE--UNLESS NEW CHRISTIAN PROVOCA-TIONS AND RESULTANT PRESSURES FORM HIS OWN MILITARY COMMANDERS FORCE HIS HAND.

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